

Epiphany 5 / February 9, 2025

Isaiah 6:1-8

*“Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”*

Your guilt is taken away. Your sin is atoned

In our gospel this morning Jesus preaches from the disciple’s fishing boat. When He finished speaking, He tells them to cast their nets into the sea for a catch of fish. When the disciples comply, they catch so many fish the nets were breaking. The disciples are shocked. Peter in particular, perhaps because he was initially resistant to the idea, reminding Jesus they had fished all night and caught nothing. He begs Jesus to depart from him for he is a sinful man. Jesus tells him not to be afraid and that from now on he will catch people, not fish. Have you ever wondered how fish feel when they are caught in a net or on hook? One moment they are in their own watery environment and suddenly they are hauled into bright sunlight and an entirely foreign environment. It takes their breath away! How do you think Peter felt when He realized he was standing in the presence of the Holy Son of God? Kind of like a fish on dry land. It probably took his breath away too! How do you think you would feel if you were suddenly brought into the presence of God? I imagine it would be quite a shock, even if we had received notification a few days in advance.

Peter and Isaiah both received quite a shock. Both realized they were standing in the presence of the Holy One; Isaiah in a heavenly vision, Peter in the presence of the Word made flesh. When they realized they were in the presence of the Lord, both immediately recognized their sinfulness. Have you ever been at a formal event and suddenly noticed a stain on your nice dress or suit? As awkward as that may be this was much worse. Peter cried out, *“Lord, go away from me for I am a sinful man.”* Isaiah lamented, *“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”* The Lord sent an angel to remove the guilt of Isaiah’s sin with a coal from the altar in heaven. The Lord sent Jesus to remove the guilt of our sin through the blood of the cross. A beautiful vision in Revelation reminds us that we take our sin-stained souls to Jesus. Seeing the saints in heaven John was told, *“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, therefore they are in the presence of God.”* We take our stained garments to a cleaner. We take our sin-stained souls to Jesus. His blood washes away the stain of our sin. He

clothes us in robes of His righteousness. In Him our guilt is taken away and our sin atoned.

It is essential that we recognize God as the Holy One and conduct ourselves accordingly in His presence. The first thing God impressed upon Israel when He made them His people was His holiness. Moses encountered God in a bush that burned but was not consumed. When he drew near the Lord commanded him, *“Do not come near, take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”* When Moses brought Israel to meet God at Mount Sinai, he likewise warned them not to come near to the mountain, lest the Lord’s holiness break out and consume them. The Lord’s holiness consumes sin and everything tainted with sin. In order to draw near to His presence our sin must be atoned for and our guilt taken away. The Lord provided this for Israel in the Old Testament through the sacrifices that were continually offered in the tabernacle and temple. The Lord provides this for all people in the New Testament era through Jesus and the sacrifice of His cross. In Him our guilt is taken away and our sin atoned.

The sacrifices of the Old Testament showed Israel, both the Lord’s holiness and their sin. Sacrifice was a gory business. Blood was everywhere. Sacrifice was a vivid reminder that sin brings death. I imagine there must have been a bad aroma with the blood and the burning of so many animals. A vivid reminder that sin stinks. God commanded sacrifice so that Israel could dwell in His presence. It showed their sin against the backdrop of His holiness. But even at that Israel could only come so close to the Lord. The Lord commanded Moses to put a fence around Mount Sinai lest the people come too close and the Lord’s holiness consume them, because of their sin. Sin creates a barrier between us and God. The sacrifices of the Old Testament made that barrier obvious. They allowed Israel a certain access to the Lord, closer than any of the other nations, but not total access into the fulness of His presence. God provides that access through Jesus and the sacrifice of His blood on the cross, by which our sin is atoned and our guilt is taken away. The sacrifices of the Old Testament did not take away guilt or atone for sin. Otherwise, they would not have been offered repeatedly year after year. They showed human sin in the light of God’s holiness. They prepared for Jesus and the sacrifice of His body on the cross. He was offered once for all. In Him our sin is atoned and our guilt is taken away. In Him and through faith in Him, we come to the Father in peace.

The temple was both a place of sacrifice and the place through which God dwelt with His people on earth. Sometimes Israel got the idea that God’s presence was

restricted to the temple. In a similar way people sometimes think that since scripture says Jesus now sits at the right hand of God the Father that He is restricted to a certain place in or beyond the universe. God was present to Israel in the world through the temple, but His presence was not limited to the temple. He fills and surround all things. As the psalmist sang, there is no place in heaven, on the earth or under the earth that we can go from His presence.

In the same way when Jesus resumed the full expression of His divine glory at His ascension to the right hand of God the Father, He filled all things with His presence. He is with the church and each believer in a special way through His Spirit, who dwells within us and among us. Jesus said that His body was the temple of God in an even more special way than the tabernacle or the temple of stone. In Him the fulness of God dwelt among us in bodily form. He is Immanuel, God with us. Through the temple of His body Jesus atoned for our sin and took our guilt away, so we may be with Him as He is with us. Now through faith, fully and forever through His resurrection to eternal life.

The Lord covered Israel's sin through the sacrifices of the temple, so that He might dwell in their midst. He did this for their benefit, not for His. He did this not to prevent Himself from being contaminated by their sin, but so that they wouldn't be consumed by His holiness, because of their sin. As the author of Hebrews said, *"Our God is a consuming fire."* No human came as close to God as Moses. The Lord spoke with him as a man speaks with his friend. God blessed Moses with His protection, so that He was able come closer into His presence than anyone else. Yet Moses' sin was not taken away. The wages of sin is death and like all other humans he died, because of his sin. Isaiah's sin was atoned and his guilt taken away in a special way by the Lord through the angel who touched his tongue with a coal from the heavenly altar. This allowed Isaiah to come closer to the Lord than most others in Israel. It sanctified him that He might hear the Lord's word. It consecrated his lips that he might speak the Lord's word to Israel. Nevertheless, he also died in his sin. Human sin was not truly and fully taken away until the coming of Jesus, God with us in human flesh. In Him our guilt is taken away and our sin atoned.

Jesus brings us into God's presence now through faith. In Him and through baptism into His death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit brings His presence into our hearts, making our bodies temples of His holiness. Through Jesus we have access to the Father at all times in prayer as our spirits commune with His Spirit. Jesus will bring us fully into His presence when He calls us to share in His resurrection to a new and eternal life. Jesus sacrificed Himself for our sin and the world's sin. In Him

our sin, the sin of Moses, the sin of Isaiah, the sin of the world, is atoned. He calls us to faith through the gospel. He nourishes our faith with the water of our baptism, the bread and wine of His holy communion. He speaks His word to our ears so that with our hearts we may believe in Him as our Saviour and be assured that our sin is atoned and our guilt is taken away. God bless us always with faith to believe and hearts to receive His grace in Christ our Saviour. In Jesus' Name. Amen.